



# Committee Daily Bulletin

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## BUDGET BRIEFINGS

COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<b>Appropriations</b>	<p>Briefing on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the following government offices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Department of Education (DepEd)</li> </ul>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Rep. Eric Go Yap (Party-List, ACT-CIS), listened to the presentations on the proposed FY 2021 budget, plans and programs, and major accomplishments of the DepEd, DFA, DICT, and DOTr.</p> <p>Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Jocelyn Sy-Limkaichong (1<sup>st</sup> District, Negros Oriental), sat as the presiding officer during the budget briefing of the DepEd and its attached agencies.</p> <p>Education Secretary Leonor Magtolis Briones expressed the hope that despite the COVID-19 pandemic, students will continue to have access to quality education. She reported that the total enrollment in public schools for SY 2020-2021 has reached 98% of last school year's record. Enrollment in the private schools started with only 27% in July but has now increased to 48% with the gradual opening of the economy. She added that students whose families have been affected by the pandemic can always enroll in public schools even if the school year is already ongoing.</p> <p>As its response to COVID-19, Briones said the DepEd developed the Basic Education Learning Continuity Plan (BE-LCP) to provide guidance on how to deliver education in this time of pandemic, while ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of all learners, teachers, and personnel of DepEd. One of the key components of the BE-LCP is the use of multiple learning modalities, with blended learning and distance learning as major options.</p> <p>Based on the 2021 National Expenditure Program (NEP), the DepEd and its attached agencies are set to receive a total budget of P605.74 billion, which is 9.54% higher than their current budget of P552.99 billion.</p> <p>Even with this budget increase, DepEd Undersecretary for Finance Annalyn Sevilla said that the P605.74 billion proposed budget approved by the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) is still 45% lower than its original budget request of P1.1 trillion for FY 2021.</p> <p>Several Members manifested their support for an increase in the budget of the DepEd to allow it to fully fulfill its mandate of delivering quality education during this time of pandemic.</p> <p>Rep. France Castro (Party-List, ACT-TEACHERS) agreed that the increase in the DepEd's budget for FY 2021 is not at all substantial considering its avowed policy of ensuring quality education amidst the pandemic. She asked if there is a budget to cover the cost of complying with minimum health standards to prevent the transmission of the COVID-19 disease in schools, such as health screening, sanitation, and disinfection of school premises, and presence of functional clinics.</p> <p>Sevilla replied that the DBM granted additional funds amounting to P4 billion for the DepEd to comply with the prescribed minimum health standards. However, funds for the conduct of COVID-19 testing and medical treatment of public school teachers who may get the disease are not part of the 2021 budget of the DepEd as</p>

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these are under the Department of Health (DOH) and the Philippine Health Insurance Corporation (PhilHealth).

Reps. Castro and Gabriel Bordado Jr. (3<sup>rd</sup> District, Camarines Sur) brought up the clamor of public school teachers to be given internet allowance to defray the cost of having internet connection as they shift to the blended mode of learning. Rep. Bordado further suggested the allowance to be pegged at P3,000 per month. However, Sevilla said that this too was not included in the DBM-approved budget of the DepEd.

Rep. Lawrence "Law" Fortun (1<sup>st</sup> District, Agusan del Norte) asked about the availability of the self-learning modules that will be used in public schools under the blended learning modality. He disclosed that teachers on the ground are soliciting money for the reproduction of the modules. He asked how much is needed to reproduce the modules and how much is the appropriated amount under the NEP.

Sevilla said that the Department estimates an amount of P35 billion to reproduce modules for all students in the elementary and secondary schools. However, the 2021 NEP only provides an amount of P15 billion for this purpose under the DepEd's budget and an additional P5 billion under the unprogrammed funds which the Department can tap later.

To compensate the huge budget deficiency, the DepEd will also source funds from the Special Education Fund (SEF) which is under the local government units and from the *Brigada Eskwela*, which is DepEd's Program that brings together teachers, parents, and community members to work together in repairing and preparing public schools for the school opening.

Rep. Fortun suggested that the Committee push for the inclusion of the P10-billion budget deficit for the production of self-learning modules in the 2021 General Appropriations Act (GAA).

On the query of Rep. Ron Salo (Party-List, KABAYAN) regarding the DepEd Computerization Program (DCP), DepEd Undersecretary Alain del Pascua said that aside from providing laptops and other gadgets to public school teachers and students, the Department also plans to undertake the Public Education Network (PEN) that will connect all public schools with the DepEd offices nationwide. Del Pascua said that 40% to 45% of public schools nationwide already have free WiFi or wireless internet access.

Rep. Paul Ruiz Daza (1<sup>st</sup> District, Northern Samar), however, noted that many public schools still do not have internet access, especially those in the provinces and far-flung areas. He requested DepEd to submit a report and relevant documents on the status of the delivery of internet connectivity in public schools.

Replying to the query of Reps. Sy-Limkaichong and Stella Luz Quimbo (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Marikina City), Sevilla said that the agency is already drafting the policy on the hiring of teaching assistants or para-teachers that would help the parents in monitoring and guiding the learners under the blended learning system. Sevilla, however, said that since there is no allocation in the 2021 NEP for the hiring of the para-teachers, the needed funds will be taken from the personnel services (PS) savings of the DepEd.

Upon hearing Sevilla's comments, Rep. Argel Joseph Cabatbat (Party-List, MAGSASAKA) requested DepEd to submit the computation of its savings from PS.

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- Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA)

Rep. Eufemia "Ka Femia" Cullamat (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) inquired about the status of the DepEd's Last Mile Schools (LMS) program. Del Pascua said that the repairs and renovations of existing school buildings, as part of the LMS program, have not been launched yet because P5 billion of the P6.5 billion fund allocated for LMS in the 2020 GAA was realigned to the Bayanihan To Heal as One Act, which is the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The remaining P1.5 billion of the LMS fund has not yet been released to DepEd, Del Pascua said.

The LMS program seeks to address the gaps in resources and facilities of schools that are located in geographically isolated and disadvantaged and conflict-affected areas. The last mile schools are those with less than four classrooms, usually makeshift and nonstandard ones; no electricity; no funds for repairs or new construction projects in the last four years; and a travel distance of more than one hour away from the center, accessible only through difficult terrain. (Source: DepEd website)

Responding to the query of Rep. Sy-Limkaichong, DOH Undersecretary for Planning Service and Field Operations Jesus Lorenzo Mateo said that the DepEd is still waiting for the guidelines from the DBM for the release of the P300 million as subsidies and allowances to displaced teaching and non-teaching personnel and P600 million for qualified students of public and private schools as provided under the Bayanihan to Recover as One Act.

After its questions have been properly answered by the DepEd, the Committee terminated the deliberations on the proposed 2021 budget of the DepEd and its attached agencies.

The Committee Chair himself presided over the budget briefing of DFA.

Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin Jr. presented the DFA's proposed budget under the FY 2021 NEP which amounts to P22.09 billion, 9.31% lower than its current year's budget of P24.22 billion.

Rep. Ferdinand Gaité (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) noted that while one of the mandates of DFA is to assist overseas Filipinos in distress, its budget for Assistance to Nationals (ATN) only increased by P1 million. He asked if the DFA is amenable to the DBM-approved budget for the ATN under the 2021 NEP.

DFA Undersecretary Sarah Lou Arriola said that the DFA originally asked for P1.5 billion budget for the ATN program, however only P1.25 billion was approved by the DBM. She said that the DFA leaves it to the wisdom of Congress if the latter deems it necessary to provide more funds for the ATN. She added, though, that the DFA will welcome such move as it can assist more overseas Filipinos if it will be given more funds.

Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Lanao del Norte) asked about developments pertaining to the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA).

Locsin said that the BIMP-EAGA has been dormant for a while but it is being revived. He informed the Committee that the Second BIMP-EAGA-China Ministerial meeting last November 2019 adopted the plan of action for BIMP-EAGA China Cooperation 2020-2025. This will serve as the guiding document to enhance mutual cooperation in the area as well as form the basis of

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China's support for BIMP-EAGA in the form of a US\$5 billion special loan from the China Development Bank.

Rep. Arlene Brosas (Party-List, GABRIELA) questioned the P24.4 million budget allocated for the Presidential Commission for Visiting Forces (PCVF) when President Rodrigo Duterte himself has signified to terminate the Visiting Forces Agreement between the governments of the Philippines and the United States. She then asked for a breakdown of the fund for PCVF.

Locsin explained that the PCVF was initially under the Office of the President but was transferred to the DFA. Under Executive Order No. 97, series of 2019, the PCVF shall be attached to the DFA while being under the oversight of the Office of the President. Now that the PCVF is already under his jurisdiction, Locsin said he will recommend a budget cut for the PCVF to reflect the President's take on the VFA issue. He promised to submit the breakdown of the PCVF's budget.

Under EO 97, the PCVF is the lead inter-agency mechanism which shall provide policy coordination and advice, guidance, and assessment to ensure that all status of forces agreements (SOFAs) serve the national interest.

Deputy Speaker and Antique Rep. Loren Legarda asked why there is no funding for cultural diplomacy, particularly the DFA's Philippine Studies Program, under the 2021 NEP.

Locsin explained that the fund earmarked for the Philippine Studies Program was realigned to the government's COVID-19 response. He, however, assured the Deputy Speaker that as soon as conditions return to normal, funds will again be channeled to the Program.

Earlier in the meeting, Rep Yap read the questions of some netizens who posted their queries on the House of Representatives' Facebook page. Among the concerns raised were regarding the status of DFA's repatriation efforts and the assistance that the government provides to OFWs who were affected by the pandemic yet opted to stay abroad.

Locsin said that about 178,000 overseas Filipinos workers (OFWs) were already repatriated by the DFA and an estimated 177,000 more are expected to be repatriated in the following months.

Arriola added that in Philippine diplomatic posts abroad where there are Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) offices, the OFWs who opt to stay abroad may seek welfare assistance from these offices. However, in countries where there are no POLO and OWWA offices, the DFA provides the needed assistance to the OFWs.

- Department of Information and Communications Technology (DICT)

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. "Kuya" Jose Antonio Sy-Alvarado (1<sup>st</sup> District, Bulacan), presided over the DICT's budget briefing.

At the outset, DICT Secretary Gregorio Honasan II said that the DICT is mandated to lead the country's movement towards true digitization, growth, and connectivity. According to Honasan, connectivity is a key factor in spurring economic growth and is an important driver in the country's effort to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted two of the DICT's flagship projects namely: the National Broadband Program (NBP) and the Free Wi-Fi Internet Access in Public Places and in Schools, Universities, and Colleges (FW4A).

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The NBP aims to provide cheaper and wider internet accessibility in the country. Meanwhile, the FW4A seeks to provide all Filipinos access to internet allowing them to participate and partake in the benefits of the emerging digital economy.

Under the 2021 NEP, the NBP and the FW4A will receive a budget of P902.2 million and P2.7 billion, respectively. This is way below the budgetary requirement of P18.18 billion for the NBP and P6.35 billion for the FW4A.

Rep. Sy-Alvarado and several other lawmakers expressed their disappointment over the budget cuts for these two programs. They believe that the DICT's budget should be increased to enable it to perform its mandate of providing internet connectivity to the government and the public at large, especially the people in the unserved, underserved, and far-flung areas.

DICT Assistant Secretary Emmanuel Rey Caintic informed the Committee that given the appropriate funding, the NBP would significantly reduce internet cost in the country and would allow the government to save as much as P4.2 billion in the first year of implementation. Within three to four years, the expected savings would have already been enough to recoup the amount spent by the government to fund the Program, Caintic added.

Despite the support from lawmakers for DICT's proposed 2021 budget, several issues cropped up relating to poor internet connection and accessibility, proliferation of cybercrimes, and breach of data privacy and security.

Some Members chided the DICT for being remiss in its duty to provide internet access to far-flung areas. Rep. Daza reminded the DICT that under Sec. 2 (e) of RA 10844, otherwise known as the "DICT Act of 2015," it is the policy of the State to ensure the availability and accessibility of ICT services in areas not adequately served by the private sector. And the DICT is expected to undertake measures to realize this state policy, Rep. Daza stressed.

Rep. Daza averred that majority of the DICT's efforts have been concentrated on improving internet access in areas already covered by big internet providers. He also asked the DICT to revisit the policy on the spectrum user fee (SUF) and look for ways to reduce it. Honasan agreed with Rep. Daza's suggestion.

The SUF is collected annually from telecommunications companies (telcos) that were assigned frequency bandwidth based on the amount of spectrum used, type of service being offered, and economic classification of the areas covered by cell sites. *(Source: National Telecommunications Commission website)*

On ICT access, Honasan explained that while the DICT is fully committed to pursuing its mandate, it is the telcos that do not cooperate fully. According to Honasan, the DICT has been asking from telcos "maps" that will show where the gaps are in terms of infrastructure and ICT accessibility, but they have not done so up to this time. Honasan also cited inadequate funding as another major stumbling block for the DICT to achieve all its goals.

Deputy Speaker Dan Fernandez (1<sup>st</sup> District, Laguna), expounding on the proliferation of cybercrimes which are oftentimes committed using fake social media accounts, said that there were more than 5,000 incidents of cybercrime reported in 2019. Of these incidents, only 6.7% resulted in the filing of cases and only 15% resulted in convictions.

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DICT Cybercrime Investigation and Coordination Center (CICC) Executive Director Cezar Mancao II claimed that most of the cybercrime cases filed were election-related. After the elections, complainants would often become disinterested resulting in the dismissal of the case, he added.

Members of the Makabayan Bloc led by Rep. Carlos Isagani Zarate (Party-List, BAYAN MUNA) and Rep. Brosas questioned the government's decision to allow Dito Telecommunity Corporation (Dito) to construct cell towers inside military facilities. The lawmakers asserted that allowing the partly Chinese-owned telco to build cell towers inside military camps poses a huge threat to national security.

Honasan assured the Members that the DICT observes due diligence to ensure that the towers will not compromise national security. National Telecommunications Commission Deputy Commissioner Edgardo Cabarios added that the selection of the third telco (Dito) was done with transparency as was the renewal of its franchise which was done through an act of Congress.

Dito, formerly known as Mindanao Islamic Telephone Company, Inc. or Mislattel, is the newest major telecommunications provider in the Philippines, aside from Globe and Smart. It is a joint venture company comprised of Udenna Corporation (led by Davao businessman Dennis Uy), Chelsea Logistics Holdings Corp., and state-run China Telecommunications Corporation.

Minority Leader Bienvenido Abante Jr. (6<sup>th</sup> District, Manila) asked about the DICT's P800-million confidential funds. Honasan replied that this was reverted back to the President's intelligence fund. When asked what the fund was for in the first place, Honasan told the Committee that it was supposed to be used to purchase ICT hardware and software and for the development of a "cyber-security end-to-end plan."

Honasan asked Congress' support for the full digitization and interconnectivity of the entire bureaucracy, which the agency is strongly pushing for. He also said that the country is in need of a stable policy direction on ICT that would encourage investors and innovators to come in.

The Committee agreed to terminate the deliberations on the proposed 2021 budget of the DICT and its attached agencies.

- Department of Transportation (DOTr)

Committee Vice Chair, Rep. Micaela Violago (2<sup>nd</sup> District, Nueva Ecija), was requested by the Chair to preside during the interpellation portion of the hearing on the proposed budget of the DOTr.

Under the FY 2021 NEP, the DOTr and its attached agencies is set to receive a budget of P143.11 billion which is 44% higher than the current year's appropriation of P99.4 billion. The increase in the budget will be for the purpose of providing funding for infrastructure projects and right of way (ROW) acquisitions. The DOTr's FY 2021 proposed budget of P143.11 billion will be distributed by expense class as follows: personnel services (PS), P13.25 billion; maintenance and other operating expenses (MOOE), P17 billion; financial expenses, P7.89 million; and capital outlay (CO), P112.86 billion.

DOTr Secretary Arthur Tugade gave a video presentation showcasing the accomplishments of the DOTr which include the completion of several infrastructure projects for the road, railway, maritime, and aviation sectors. He also said that in spite of the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the DOTr remains

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committed to the delivery of vital public service. The DOTr is paving the way for enhanced mobility and connectivity, which he said is the key to progress.

House Members proceeded to ask questions on matters pertaining to the implementation of projects of the DOTr.

Rep. Yap asked if the Mindanao Railway Project will still continue. He also asked about the cause of delay in the implementation of the Motor Vehicle Inspection System (MVIS), a state-of-the-art network of motor vehicle inspection centers all over the Philippines that will conduct roadworthiness and emission tests.

DOTr Assistant Secretary for Project Implementation (Mindanao Cluster) Eymard Eje said that the Mindanao Railway Project will still push through and is currently in the process of procurement for the project monitoring consultancy package of the rail works. He said that the contractor for the project has not been chosen yet as there has been a delay in the submission of the shortlist of bidders for the build-and-design contract by the Chinese government. The P82.9-billion railway's first phase (covering the 100.2-kilometer Tagum-Davao-Digos segment) will be financed through an official development assistance package from the Chinese government, according to Eje.

On the delayed implementation of the MVIS, DOTr Assistant Secretary for Procurement and Project Implementation Giovanni Lopez explained that the process of selecting the sites where MVIS centers will be established involves careful study by the LTO as it has to take into account the number of motor vehicles in a particular area.

Rep. Yap also recommended to the DOTr to further improve the new Land Transportation Management System (LTMS) in order to effectively serve more people especially during the pandemic.

The LTMS is an online portal where transactions with the Land Transportation Office (LTO) can be done, such as submitting an application, booking an appointment, and paying for driver's license fees. It was launched in June in light of the social distancing guidelines to further prevent the spread of COVID-19. *(Source: LTO website)*

Rep. Brosas inquired how much of DOTr's 2020 budget was realigned for COVID-19 response. She also asked if the DOTr provided financial assistance to the drivers affected by the pandemic apart from the Social Amelioration Program (SAP) of the government.

DOTr Undersecretary for Finance Garry de Guzman said that the amount of P14 billion was realigned for the government's COVID-19 response.

Secretary Tugade explained that the DOTr does not have its own social amelioration program for affected drivers but it provided the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) with the list of drivers that are qualified for the SAP.

On the other hand, the DOTr provides financial assistance to transport cooperatives and corporations participating in the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program for the upgrade of their fleet into safe and efficient units with low-carbon emission. Scholarships for the dependents of drivers as well as livelihood training programs are also available in partnership with the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

<p>Continuation... Appropriations</p>		<p>Deputy Speaker Fernandez lauded the cashless payment scheme adopted by the DOTr for tollways and expressways using the Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). He asked the DOTr to study the use of a single RFID tag or sticker that will be valid in all or most expressways so that the stickers will not crowd the windshield of vehicles. He also inquired on the plan of the DOTr to adopt cashless payments for other modes of transportation such as buses and jeepneys.</p> <p>Tugade said that the DOTr is targeting the transition to the Automatic Fare Collection System (AFCS) by the end of the year, which will cover all public transportation.</p> <p>Several Members lauded the efforts of the DOTr to continue to improve and modernize the transportation system in the country even amidst the pandemic.</p> <p>Even as the Committee agreed to terminate the deliberation on the proposed 2021 budget of the DOTr and its attached agencies, the Department was directed to submit the documents that were requested by the Members during today's meeting.</p>
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DISCUSSION WITH AGENCIES/ENTITIES		
COMMITTEE	SUBJECT MATTER	DISCUSSIONS
<p><b>Higher and Technical Education</b></p>	<p>Discussion of issues and concerns on the <i>Tulong Dunong</i> Program (TDP)</p>	<p>The Committee, chaired by Baguio City Rep. Mark Go, discussed with the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) issues and concerns relative to the TDP.</p> <p>Rep. Go said that the objective of the meeting is to know the status of implementation of the TDP and to address issues and concerns relative to its implementation.</p> <p>TDP is a grants-in-aid under the Student Financial Assistance Programs (StuFAPs) of CHED for poor students who are enrolled or will enroll in public or private higher education institutions. A student grantee is entitled to a maximum of P12,000 grant per academic year or P6,000 grant per semester which may be used in support for educational expenses and cost of living allowance. <i>(Source: CHED website)</i></p> <p>CHED Chairman J. Prospero de Vera III informed the body that he has directed the CHED regional offices not to accept applications for this year's TDP because funding for this program is not certain. He explained that the funding for the TDP for this year was a realignment of Congress which was placed under the Tertiary Education Subsidy (TES) fund which is part of the allocation for RA 10931 (Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education Act) under the 2020 General Appropriations Act (GAA).</p> <p>De Vera said that the Department of Budget and Management (DBM) informed CHED that budgetary items which are realignments made by Congress could not be released in January because they are part of the "For Later Release" (FLR) provision in the 2020 GAA. This means that the FLR items will be dependent on the availability of funds as determined by the DBM and the Office of the President, he added.</p> <p>De Vera also reported that the CHED has already sent a request to the DBM last month to release the budget of CHED's expenditure items under FLR for FY 2020. He also sought the help of the Committee to bring the matter up to the House Leadership so that this can be taken up with the DBM.</p>

<p>Continuation... Higher and Technical Education</p>		<p>Rep. Geraldine Roman (1<sup>st</sup> District, Bataan) asked CHED on the reason behind the slow processing of financial assistance for TDP scholars.</p> <p>De Vera cited the lack of manpower to handle about 1.7 million student applicants for the TDP. He said that CHED only has about 1,000 employees nationwide and only three or four personnel are handling the applications in CHED regional offices who are mostly hired as job order or contractual employees. He assured the body that once CHED has increased its manpower, the applications for TDP will be processed faster.</p> <p>Deputy Speaker Ferdinand Hernandez (2<sup>nd</sup> District, South Cotabato), suggested that CHED should issue an official announcement that the implementation of the TDP will still continue but the release of grants for TDP scholars for Academic Year 2020-2021 will just be delayed subject to the release of funds by the DBM.</p> <p>De Vera replied that CHED will make an official announcement on the matter within the week. A copy of this announcement shall be submitted to the Committee.</p>
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